



California Medical Association

Physicians dedicated to the health of Californians

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July 9, 2003

Tommy Thompson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave, SW
Washington DC 20201

Dear Secretary Thompson:

On behalf of the California Medical Association and its member physicians, I am writing to urge you to following the guidelines set forth in the Federal Advisory Committee Act when making appointments to scientific and public health advisory panels and committees. Additionally, we ask you to develop more specific criteria related to scientific expertise, financial disclosure, conflict of interest and diversity for appointment to scientific and public health advisory committees/panels.

We are most concerned that members of committees such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee to the Director of the National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH), CDC's Advisory Committee on Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention (ACCLPP), the Food and Drug Administration's Reproductive Health Drugs Advisory Committee, and the DHHS's National Human Research Protections Advisory Committee (NHRPAC) are free of direct financial conflicts of interest and that any potential conflict of interest is disclosed to the naming agency and the public prior to any appointment so that they can be evaluated for any potentially disqualifying biases. Additionally, criteria should be developed to assure that only the most qualified scientists and experts in their fields are appointed to these committees, as these committees are a core component in ensuring that the best science is brought to bear to protect the public's health.

As you know, the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) states that federal advisory committees must be "fairly balanced in terms of points of view represented," and that such committees must "not be inappropriately influenced by the appointing authority or by any special interest." We urge you to assure that all your health advisory panels meet these guidelines.

It is important that expert panels or committees continue to be viewed as impartial and using evidence-based information in order for the panels to maintain credibility when giving scientific advice. To this end, we urge you to reevaluate existing panels membership and assure that future members both meet the highest scientific standard(s), have no conflict of interest(s) and maintain a diverse membership.

Sincerely,

Ronald P. Bangasser, MD
President
Cc: Executive Committee